

Pull of the Moon

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(Justine/Ramona)

Pull of the Moon

It had been two weeks since Justine discovered her destiny and Ramona hadn't been able to sleep since. Every night, at exactly twelve, instinct pulled Ramona awake to the sound of feet padding around her room. And every night, she followed that sound around the corners and into the shadows of the school halls only to find herself at the dance studio's doors. Noticing one of the mahogany doors left ajar, she peeked into the room, where she found Justine.

The ballerina danced around the darkened room, her limbs graceful in their sweeping movements. There was moonlight in her hair, catching in her brunette curls whenever she moved close enough to the wall of floor-to-ceiling windows. It showered her in milky light and made her dark skin appear to glow, luminous, as she spun and leapt. She was a pure vision of loveliness, a dream, which was coincidentally the very thing she was having. Despite the fearless way her body moved, Justine's eyes were closed. It seemed that, even in her sleep, the twelfth Dancing Princess couldn't resist the allure of her destiny.

This habit had been going on for a fortnight now and, each time it occurred, Ramona was there to spectate. She didn't know why she was so drawn to watching Justine dance. Then again, she didn't really think about it too hard. She only stood, intense eyes peering through the crack between the doors and a sense of beauty dancing in her own heart. Maybe she should have stopped Justine. The thought had occurred to her that it couldn't have been healthy for the princess to miss so much sleep, but Ramona never could bring herself to wake her, deciding instead to remain passive. It was a decision she came to regret the moment Justine collapsed to the floor.

Ramona threw open the door. She was by Justine's side as soon as her eyes began to flutter, a hand placed protectively on her arm.

"Ramona?" Justine asked in a small voice. She looked into Ramona's eyes with a far-away gaze, still dazed from sleep. "What are you doing here? What's happening? Where am I?"

"Not important. Are you okay?"

"I-I don't know"

"Do you feel lightheaded?"

"I don't think so"

"Can you walk?"

"Ramona." Justine's voice was strong as diamond. Her eyes were beginning to focus now, clear and attentive. "Stop asking me if I'm okay. I'm fine, really. Confused, but fine," she said, getting to her feet. "See? Couldn't be" A look of shock crossed her face and, before she knew what was happening, she was falling.

Ramona caught her by the arms, effortlessly pulling her to her feet with a strength and speed that surprised Justine. "You aren't okay," she decided, words hard, though there was concern behind her sapphire eyes. "We're going to Nurse Fine Fettle."

"No, no! Don't. Please."

It was the plea that made Ramona stop, though she hated to waste any more time talking when her instincts were telling her to act. She raised her unkempt brows at the ballerina, impatient.

"Don't wake the nurse. It's not necessary to bother her so late. I sprained my ankle, that's all. Nothing serious. Please, just take me back to the dorm for the night. I promise I'll see the nurse in the morning."

Ramona stared, looking up and down her round eyes and pouting lips. Finally, she heaved a curt sigh and resigned herself. It didn't look like Justine would budge and, besides, she didn't want to risk having the other fight her and further injure herself if Ramona tried to forcibly take her.

"Fine," she said sharply, and began to pull Justine's arm commandingly.

"Ramona!" Justine startled. "I can't| A little help, please?"

Ramona glanced over her shoulder and then, suddenly, she did something a Badwolf never did. She looked sheepish. "Oh."

"I need to lean on you for support." Justine took Ramona's hand and guided it around her own waist, then moved her arm around Ramona's shoulders. The Wolf stiffened at having her hand held, even briefly, but didn't say anything.

The walk back to their dorm was quiet and difficult. Partway through, Justine began to tilt away from Ramona's hold, unable to help herself whenever pain shot through her ankle. Ramona ended up pulling her closer, pressing Justine into her side to make things easier on her. Ramona was mostly focused on getting Justine to their dorm as quickly and efficiently as possible, but she wasn't completely ignorant to the way Justine kept glancing up at her various times throughout the walk either.

Thankfully, their dorm shared a floor with the dance studio and it wasn't long before Ramona was shoving the dorm door open with the sole of her black boot. She led Justine to her own bed and, with some maneuvering, managed to slide her onto it without discomforting her much. Justine instantly looked relieved to be off her feet.

"Wait! Where are you going?" she asked Ramona, who was already stalking towards the door.

"I'll be back." That was all she said before she slipped away, into the darkened hallway.

By the time Ramona returned, Justine had situated herself by removing her slippers and propping up some decorative, frilled pillows behind her back to lean against.

"Where have you been?" Justine fixed her eyes on Ramona in the dark, only one fairy-lamp illuminating her area of the room in soft, golden light. "This is hardly the time to go wandering the campus in the dark."

Brow quirked, Ramona held up a large bundle of ACE bandages as she stepped into the light.

"Where on earth did you get those?"

"Nurse's office."

"But it's locked." Justine squinted her eyes, scrutinizing Ramona's unfazed expression. She gasped. "Did you break in? Did you steal those?" she whispered furiously.

"Borrowed. I'll give them back."

"Ramona!"

"Enough." Her eyes flashed a dangerous amber color. "You need these and I wasn't about to spend the night listening to you toss and turn. Now, give me your foot."

Justine pressed her lips, but otherwise listened. She turned her body in the bed and held out the injured ankle, wincing when her heel met Ramona's firm hold.

Ramona knelt beside Justine's circular bed and placed the dancer's foot on her leg to work. She was sure to be especially careful, her fingers a whisper against Justine's skin as she pressed and wrapped. Truthfully, she felt bad for snapping, but she felt worse that Justine had to see her that way. Usually, she was quick to bare her fangs and scare off any unwanted company, but things were different

with Justine. The girl was soft, elegant, too much of a princess to know how to handle the Big Bad Wolf, not that it stopped her from trying to befriend Ramona most of the time.

"How do you know how to do this?" Justine suddenly asked.

Ramona barely glanced up through her lashes.

"I just mean you seem to really know what you're doing, so I was wondering, you know, how did you learn? Why?" she prodded.

"My dad taught me," she said, and that was all she said until Justine used her heel to nudge the leg Ramona had placed her heel on.

"Knowing how to take care of minor injuries is an important skill. Scratches, scrapes, and sprained ankles tend to happen a lot when you frequent the Dark Forest"and, trust me," she said, eyes fierce as they searched Justine's face, "you don't want to find yourself stuck in the Dark Forest with the scent of blood trailing you or a wounded ankle. Some creatures take that as a welcome sign for prey."

Justine fell into thought after that, and Ramona was grateful for the resulting silence. Perhaps she had scared her with her talk of life in the Dark Forest. Perhaps that was a good thing, a reminder to the princess that they came from very different worlds, maybe too different.

"I want to say thank you." Justine's voice was soberer, more sincere this time. "For helping me. Letting me lean on you. Getting me these bandages. Wrapping my ankle. All of it. You didn't have to do any of it, but you did."

Ramona grunted dismissively.

"It was kind and goodhearted," she continued, ignoring the way Ramona shifted uneasily. "I must be lucky to have someone like you looking out for me. I don't know what would've happened if you weren't"by my side"

Ramona's jaw hardened. She had hoped Justine wouldn't have realized, but by the trail of her voice Ramona knew that she had, and she wasn't prepared to answer for the questions it would surely raise.

"How were you by my side so quickly? I opened my eyes and your face was the first thing I saw. I mean, you would've had to have been there when it happened, but that's"

"I was there." There was an edge in Ramona's voice, warning Justine against venturing anything further, though she paid no mind to it.

"You were there"watching me?"

Ramona parted her lips to respond, but nothing came out. She eventually chose to focus on the folding action her hands were performing instead. "Stop talking and let me wrap your ankle."

"B-But why would you be watching me? And why tonight? Unless" Her words grew quieter. "Unless it wasn't just tonight."

Justine never did know when to stop. Ramona knew, if anyone else had pushed her to a point as far as this, she would've snarled and raged long ago. Things were different with Justine, it was true, but she was still the Wolf, and that was one thing that would not change.

Ramona lifted herself from the floor. She grabbed hold of the pink comforter on either side of Justine and, slowly, she pulled herself nearer until she was so close that Justine's jasmine fragrance filled her nose and the princess was forced to fall back on her palms. Ramona's eyes flashed. "I like to watch you dance. I like the way you look with moonlight in your hair, when you dance to music that only you can hear because it comes from your heart. It reminds me of the rituals back home and the way she-wolves dance beneath the full moon. You have passion in your veins, princess, and I think," she bit her lip, "that is worthy of my respect."

Ramona sunk back to the floor, leaving Justine flush. She returned to the wrap to tear off the end with her teeth and finish fastening the clips. A small smirk pulled at the corner of her claret lips, triumph in her expression for her ability to finally, finally silence Justine.

She gingerly patted the wrap. "Good as new," she said in mock cheeriness.

Ramona rose again to return to her half of the room, but not before grazing Justine's skin with her claws, making her shiver. Ramona turned away, a fanged smile spreading on her face as the princess's heartbeat drummed away in her ears.

End
file.